

News From \_\_\_\_\_

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**BYRD QUESTIONS OBAMA ADMINISTRATION  
ON ROLE OF WHITE HOUSE “CZAR” POSITIONS**

*“Rapid and easy accumulation of power by White House staff  
can threaten Constitutional system of checks and balances”*

Washington, DC – Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., the Constitutional conscience of the Senate, has written to President Barack Obama expressing his concerns over the increasing appointments of White House “czars,” and the relationship between these new White House positions and their executive branch counterparts, noting that “too often, I have seen these lines of authority and responsibility become tangled and blurred, sometimes purposely, to shield information and to obscure the decision-making process.”

Byrd, in his February 23 letter, specifically referenced the creation of new White House Offices of Health Reform, Urban Affairs Policy, and Energy and Climate Change Policy, noting that “the rapid and easy accumulation of power by White House staff can threaten the Constitutional system of checks and balances. At the worst, White House staff have taken direction and control of programmatic areas that are the statutory responsibility of Senate-confirmed officials.”

“As presidential assistants and advisers, these White House staffers are not accountable for their actions to the Congress, to cabinet officials, and to virtually anyone but the president. They rarely testify before congressional committees, and often shield the information and decision-making process behind the assertion of executive privilege. In too many instances, White House staff have been allowed to inhibit openness and transparency, and reduce accountability,” Byrd’s letter continued.

Byrd cited President Obama’s recent memorandum to the executive departments and agencies in which Obama noted that, “A democracy requires accountability, and accountability requires transparency.”

“As you develop your White House organization, I hope you will favorably consider the following: that assertions of executive privilege will be made only by the President, or with the President’s specific approval; that senior White House personnel will be limited from exercising authority over any person, any program, and any funding within the statutory responsibility of a Senate-confirmed department or agency head; that the President will be responsible for resolving any disagreement between a Senate-confirmed agency or department head and White House staff; and that the lines of authority and responsibility in the Administration will be transparent and open to the American public,” the letter requested and concluded.

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